

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

**STATEMENT OF
ROBERT M. JOHNSON
CHAIRMAN**

on behalf of

Oklahoma City Memorial Foundation

before the

Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

of the Committee on Resources

United States House of Representatives

on

H.R. 1849

A Bill to Establish the Oklahoma City National Memorial
and Create the Oklahoma City National Memorial Trust

September 9, 1997

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Robert M. Johnson. I am the Chairman of the Oklahoma City Memorial Foundation, serving as a volunteer pursuant to the June, 1995 appointment of Oklahoma City Mayor Ron Norick.

In April of 1995, President and Mrs. Clinton came to Oklahoma just days following the worst terrorist attack on American soil. The President said then:

"All of you, the brave people of Oklahoma, made it clear to the entire nation and to the world that the very deeds of those who sought terror to divide us brought us closer together...And we'll be right by your side until the work is done."

Just one month following the bombing, President Clinton told the nation that in the months ahead, our nation would look to Oklahoma again to provide the vision and inspiration to appropriately memorialize America's tragedy.

In response, Mayor Norick created the 350 member Murrah Federal Building Memorial Task Force, which is known today as the Oklahoma City Memorial Foundation.

The Foundation embraced the challenge of memorializing a national tragedy so unprecedented in American history. We democratized the memorial process by making it open and inclusive. There have been no political, socio-economic or other barriers to participation. Most importantly, we have actively solicited and encouraged and given great deference to participation by family members and survivors in all aspects of the memorial process. This memorial process has been transforming and has contributed to the healing of our city, our state and our nation, and most importantly, those most directly affected by the tragedy. As one family member said - through the memorial process, chaos has been transformed into hope and unity.

Incredibly, all votes on critical decisions in this process have been unanimous, including the one for the adoption of the Memorial Mission Statement, which came after several months of receiving input from victims' families and survivors and other caring people from all over the world. The opening lines of the Mission Statement are:

We come here to remember those who were killed, those who survived and those changed forever. May all who leave here know the impact of violence. May this Memorial offer comfort, strength, peace, hope and serenity.

The Mission Statement requires that the Oklahoma City National Memorial consist of an interactive learning museum, together with an institute dedicated to the prevention of terrorism and violence and finally a remembrance component. This last element was created by Hans and Torrey Butzer and Sven Berg and was recently selected through an international design competition which drew entries from all 50 states and 23 countries. This design was chosen on the first secret ballot of the Selection Committee by unanimous vote. It was subsequently approved by unanimous vote at a joint meeting of the Board and the Families and Survivors Committee of the Oklahoma City Memorial Foundation.

By its very nature, the April 19, 1995 bombing was an attack on the American Government and our public servants, and, as such, it was an attack on each American. Although the bombing occurred in Oklahoma City, the national and international impact and reaction make it clear that by no means should this be memorialized as just an Oklahoma City or State of Oklahoma tragedy. Equally important is the federal character of the site of the attack and the significant number of the victims and survivors who were innocent federal public servants.

The Oklahoma City National Memorial will memorialize America's Tragedy by preserving the memory of the victims and survivors of the tragedy, by emphatically confirming the unification of spirit of all Americans in the wake of disaster, and by sending a powerful message to the world of the senselessness of terrorism as a means of effecting societal or government change.

Although the response to the Oklahoma City bombing reminded the world that Americans are capable of great compassion, selflessness and unity when tragedy strikes, our response is not yet complete. We respectfully request your participation in the memorialization of America's tragedy by enacting H.R. 1849.

Thank you.

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